



# Direct Communication Project

---

Resource No. 35

## The Boarding School Option

### **Making the Decision:**

Choosing whether to send your child to a boarding school may be even more difficult than you anticipated. Most Americans did not grow up with the tradition of attending boarding school and did not plan this as the way to educate their children. Sometimes, however, choosing the boarding school option may be the best choice for your child. Depending on your post of assignment you may have most or none of the expenses paid through the education allowance. The added expense, however, may be necessary for you to provide the best education for your child.

### **Reasons to Take Advantage of the Boarding School Option for Your Family:**

*Lack of available appropriate schooling at your post of assignment.* The best assignment for the employee may lack a school that can meet the needs of your child. The reasons can be anything from no school available, to one that only teaches in a language your child does not speak, or one that does not have the range of offerings your gifted or special needs child requires. It may be such a small school that there will not be enough social interaction. An academically gifted student may be ready for more advanced courses than a school can offer.

*Consistency.* Changing schools every few years has an impact on children at any age. As students reach the high school or even middle school years the changes become even more challenging. It can be academically and socially frustrating to change schools during the high school years, especially if there are several moves during those crucial years. Coursework begun at one school may not have a more advanced level at the next.

Programs can differ from an American curriculum and not be easily transferable. The IB (International Baccalaureate) programs usually depend on two consecutive years, the junior and senior years, in one school. Typically, the two years prior to that also support that particular program. Some courses transfer easily while others do not. Local schools and some international schools do not necessarily use an American curriculum and will not lead to an American high school diploma. While this will not necessarily preclude a child from attending an American university it may make transfer to an American curriculum high school challenging.

*Being in a safe environment.* Sometimes choosing a boarding school is essential for safety and security when an overseas environment restricts freedom of movement. For teenagers who need increasing independence as they develop toward adulthood, a boarding school environment can be a safe, directed place to explore within set guidelines and regulations.

*Medical care.* Being in a community where appropriate physical or mental health care can be readily accessible may be a necessary priority. That care may be available within a boarding school community but not at an isolated overseas post.

*Special support.* Many boarding schools can offer support services such as supervised study and study skills training for the struggling student. Other schools specialize in students who have particular needs, such as a learning disability or those working below their capabilities.

*Special talents.* If your child has special skills or is gifted in a particular area, such as the arts or sciences or sports, you will find more boarding school choices with a boarding school available for nearly any talent.

### **Resources of Information:**

So you have made the choice to pursue the boarding school option. Where do you start? There are so many choices that it may seem overwhelming at first. There is, however, a school that will be just right for your child.

Within the Department of State there are several resources to begin your search or ask further questions:

- **Employee Consultation Service (ECS):**  
Appropriate special needs facilities, and approval for additional funding to meet the needs of these children. Contact the Employee Consultation Service (ECS), Director, Anne Weiss, 202-663-1815 or [weissae@state.gov](mailto:weissae@state.gov)
- **Family Liaison Office (FLO):**  
General information and guidance. Contact the Family Liaison Office (FLO) Education and Youth Officer, Marjorie Bigelow, 202-647-1076 or [bigelowmn@state.gov](mailto:bigelowmn@state.gov)
- **Office of Allowances (A/OPR/ALS):**  
Specific questions on allowances. Contact the Office of Allowances (A/OPR/ALS), Betty Stewart, 202-261-8715 or [stewartba@state.gov](mailto:stewartba@state.gov); or Audrey Thurman, 202-261-8717 or [thurmanae@state.gov](mailto:thurmanae@state.gov)

- Office of Overseas Schools (A/OS):  
Listing of boarding schools as reported by CLOs. Consult the Office of Overseas Schools (A/OS), Summary School Information Forms, CD-ROM. Available in CLO offices, A/OS, Overseas Briefing Center, Foreign Service Lounge, or FLO.

**Websites:**

- One starting point would be the website of the Foreign Service Journal:  
[www.afsa.org/ads/school\\_glance.html](http://www.afsa.org/ads/school_glance.html)
- Another information source is The Association of Boarding schools (TABS), or their booklet which should be available in the CLO office, or at OBC, or FLO. This website allows you to sort schools by some of the factors listed below to narrow down your choices. The TABS website: [www.schools.com](http://www.schools.com)
- For special needs children try the National Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children : [www.napsec.com](http://www.napsec.com)

**Factors to Consider when Choosing a School:**

You can eliminate some of the hundreds of choices by determining the factors that are most important to you and your child. Your child should be an integral part of this decision making process. Some of those factors are:

*Co-ed or single sex?*

*Where?* Though it is always important to be near a source of support, either close friends or relatives, consideration should also be given to connections to airports. Many boarding schools will help with transportation to and from the airport. Do you want your child to be in the U.S. or in Europe or some other location in closer proximity to where you are?

*Size?* Some schools are intimate, less than 100 students, while others can be 500-1,000, or more.

*How many of the students are international?* You will discover that the child who grew up in an international environment will often seek out contact with other children who feel not entirely comfortable with the American culture. Whether they are American children brought up overseas or not even American at all; these TCKs (Third Culture Kids) are a unique culture. Not quite American, not quite anything else!

*Mostly a day school or mostly boarding?* It can make a difference to a child if most of the students are day students or five-day boarders and leave for most weekends. Full-time boarders could be left with few activities and no where to go. If you will not have relatives or friends committed to being available for weekends, be sure you choose a school with lots of weekend activities. Some schools have Saturday morning classes and

few weekends or holidays on which they are closed. Some schools have few boarders while others are 100 percent boarding.

*Level of support for boarders?* How accessible are counselors and staff? How does the communication system work to parents? Who notices that a student needs assistance?

*Specialties?* Military? Religious preference? Special needs?

*Uniforms or special codes of conduct?* Dress codes, honor codes, drug testing. Under which guidelines will you and your child be comfortable?

*Special offerings for the arts?* Performance or enjoyment level?

*Sports available?* Somewhere, everything is available but the level of play will vary. Are you hoping for an athletic scholarship to a college or pure enjoyment of a lifetime sport?

*Range of academics?* Every type of school is available, from the most competitive college prep to the more average or supportive environments.

*Climate and environment?* Just must have a beach? Horses? Skiing? Summer year around? Four seasons? A place of solitude or urban sites and sounds?

*Level of technology provided?* Many boarding schools are very much a part of the technology age and wired for computers and email. Others are not.

*Cost?* Your allowance may not cover all the expenses. Most expenses will be paid if you are eligible for an away from post (boarding) education allowance, however, if the school of choice exceeds the average boarding school, or the school has many additional expenses not included in the basic cost, you may find yourself with lots of out of pocket expenses. Distance from the post may also add airfare costs if further than the distances priced. (See FAQ's for more information on how the allowance is calculated.) You can find the current away from post education allowance in the table of allowances (section 920) on the Office of Allowances web page, on the Intranet <http://aoprals.a.state.gov> , or Internet [www.state.gov/www/perdiems/allowances\\_index.html](http://www.state.gov/www/perdiems/allowances_index.html)

*When to make the move?* There are a few schools in the U.S. which offer junior boarding (eighth grade and lower) but that is more common in the UK or Europe. Schools in the northeastern U.S. often have the largest influx of students at tenth grade (children attend private day schools through grade nine) while others generally have most students entering at ninth grade. Some schools do not admit seniors. Some schools will accept new mid-year students at any level. One can always ask.

**The Application Process:**

The application process for a boarding school can be similar to college. There are forms to fill out, fees to pay, tests to take, transcripts to send, and letters of references required. An interview may not be required or you may be able to do it over the phone. A visit to the school is certainly recommended so you know if the school is a good fit.

The SSAT, an SAT for secondary school admission, is often required. You can receive information from their website: [www.ssat.org](http://www.ssat.org) Flexible (flex) test sites and times can be arranged, if necessary, in addition to the regularly scheduled dates and locations. Ask your CLO or the FLO for more information on this.

Many schools will offer some level of financial aid but this too must be competed for at an early point in the application process. Most schools have limited funds for tuition assistance. If you find your circumstances have changed, such as if you no longer qualify for an education allowance when you return to the States for an assignment but would like your teen to continue at the boarding school, let the school know. They might be able to assist with more financial aid.

Ask the schools or FLO for student referrals at a particular boarding school so your child can begin an email communication with someone there to ask those questions that the admissions people might not answer as easily.

The same advice holds true for boarding school visits as you might have for colleges, if you know a boarding school is in the future try to visit a few. The visits will give you a baseline to compare others. It will help you prioritize the various factors and choices that are important to you and to your child. You can see if that dorm room or cafeteria or mountaintop setting will be as important a factor as it seemed at first.

Though the decision to allow your child to attend a boarding school may be a difficult one for your family, it may just be the right one.

## **Frequently Asked Questions on the Away From Post Education Allowance**

(References: DSSR 270, 920, and 960 Education Allowance Worksheet)

***What is the new change in the regulations?*** Based on a recent change in the law, the regulations were amended in February 2000 to allow more flexibility for families choosing a boarding school option. The changed wording in the regulations now allows families to choose to use the “at post” allowance toward the full range of boarding school expenses (tuition, room and board, and periodic transportation between the school and employee’s foreign post). Previously when there was an adequate school at post the allowance could only be used to defray the tuition portion of boarding school expenses.

***How is the boarding school allowance calculated?*** The boarding school allowance, or the “away from post” education allowance, is calculated to include the cost of the average boarding school plus three round trip airfares to the nearest location where an American curriculum boarding school is located. Thirty boarding schools are selected by allowances, in consultation with the Family Liaison Office (M/DGHR/FLO), to calculate this average. The airfare component is calculated by averaging the full, non-restricted roundtrip economy airfare between post and the two nearest American curriculum boarding schools for Asian posts they are Osaka and Honolulu; for Africa, Europe, and Near East & South Asia they are Rome and London; and for South and Central America (including Canada and Bermuda) they are Miami and New York.

The education allowances are defined as “at post” and “away from post”. The “at post” allowance is based on the cost of the least expensive adequate school at post. The grades for which that school is considered adequate\* will have the same “at post” and “away from post” allowance rate. (See DSSR 920 for all foreign post education allowance rates or DSSR 274.12c for separate special needs education allowance rates.) In DSSR 920, for any grades for which there is not a school at post which is deemed adequate, there will be a higher “away from post” education allowance rate.

***Who can choose a boarding school?*** Any Foreign Service agency employee with a child kindergarten through twelfth grade on the parent’s orders, assigned to an overseas post, who is eligible to receive an education allowance, can use that allowance toward either an at post school or for a boarding school. [In order to use the away from post education allowance available for special needs children under DSSR 274.12c, State Department employees must have the concurrence of State’s medical Employee Consultation Service Office (M/DGHR/MED/ECS)]. (Employees serving with non-Foreign Service agencies and DOD employees should check with their agencies for pertinent regulations.)

When the boarding school option is chosen the family will be reimbursed for allowable expenses (DSSR 277.2) up to the maximum away from post education allowance rate shown in DSSR 920. If the school at post is considered adequate the away from post and at post allowance will be the same. Parents would be responsible for any amounts above the maximum. When the school at post is not considered adequate, the at post allowance will reflect the cost of the local school and the away from post allowance will be

calculated to allow parents to have most costs of a boarding school reimbursed. (See DSSR Regs 272.2.)

***Will the away from post allowance cover all boarding school and travel expenses?*** The away from post allowance is calculated to cover average costs. If the boarding school you choose is more than the average cost, or at a greater distance than the geographic area on which the amount is calculated, or if your child travels more often than the three times a year on which the amount is determined, you will undoubtedly have out of pocket expenses. In addition, school trips, pocket money, laundry, computer or equipment charges, and other similar expenses not ordinarily free of charge in public schools in the U.S. are not covered. (See DSSR 277.2.)

***What if we are at a post where dependents are not allowed?*** When on involuntary SMA the family may choose to use the away from post allowance in lieu of involuntary SMA for the child. The child cannot reside in the same country as a parent. (DSSR 276.23.)

***If my family is on voluntary SMA and residing in the United States can I choose boarding school for my child?*** Yes, in lieu of voluntary SMA. (Note: SMA is requested for each family member not necessarily for all family members.) Per DSSR 276.3, however, if a parent (natural, adoptive, or step) of the child resides in the United States, the child cannot receive an education allowance for attending a school in the United States unless that parent is divested of legal custody or is mentally or physically unfit to care for the child, or the step-parent is estranged from the employee.

***What if we are evacuated and my child is already in boarding school in the States?*** If a parent is evacuated back to the States, the child can complete the current school year but would not be eligible to receive an education allowance for the following year if a parent is residing in the States.

***If the parent in the States is divorced or separated from the parent serving overseas can an “away from post” education allowance be paid?*** If a natural or adoptive parent lives in the States and the child is attending school in the States, the child would be expected to be able to live with that parent and attend public school free, or private school at their own expense. When the parent residing in the States has no custody rights (“totally divested of custody”) or is mentally or physically unable to care for the child, an exception can be made. (See DSSR 276.3 for details.)

***Transferring from the U.S: our arrival at our new foreign post will be after the beginning of the school year for the boarding school. Can we send our child to start the year on time even though we will arrive at our assignment sometime later?*** Yes, if the school at post is inadequate and there is a higher away from post education allowance. An education allowance can be paid for up to a semester before the employee’s arrival at the post, but no reimbursement can be made until the employee arrives at the post. The child’s attendance at the beginning of the school term must be fairly attributable to the employee’s pending assignment. (See DSSR 276.7 for details.)

***What if I get transferred in the middle of a school year?*** If you are transferred foreign post to foreign post you can elect to finish the school year at the original rate or transfer to the new rate. If transferred back to the States it would be up to the head of the agency (or designee) to waive recovery of the pro-rated funds to complete a school year. (See DSSR 276.5 for the details.)

***If we are assigned overseas can we have our child in a boarding school in the same country?*** Yes, as long as the school is so far beyond normal daily commuting distance to necessitate room and board. (See DSSR definitions 271.e.)

***Can our child receive supplementary instruction for tutoring at boarding school?*** No, parents are expected to choose a school whose fees will cover the needs of the child.

### **Special Needs Concerns:**

Special needs concerns are addressed in the special needs information cable (State 034356, February 25, 2000). This special needs information is also available on State's Intranet site: (<http://aoprals.a.state.gov/perdiems/resources.htm>) and the Department of State's Internet site: ([www.state.gov/www/perdiems/whatsnew.html](http://www.state.gov/www/perdiems/whatsnew.html)).

\*Adequate is defined as: an elementary school (grades kindergarten and 1 – 8 or equivalent) or secondary school (grades 9 – 12 or equivalent) not requiring mandatory denominational religious instruction and providing an educational curriculum and services reasonably comparable to those normally provided without charge in public schools in the United States. The major criterion of “adequacy” is whether a child of normal ability, upon completion of a grade, or its equivalent, can enter the next higher grade in a public school in the United States.

**For more information about Education, check the Family Liaison Office web sites**

***Intranet:*** <https://hrweb.hr.state.gov/flo/flo.html>

***Internet:*** <http://www.state.gov/www/flo/>